

**STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
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THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,  
FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL  
RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 1145, TO ESTABLISH THE MUSCLE SHOALS  
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN THE STATE OF ALABAMA, AND FOR OTHER  
PURPOSES.**

**JULY 12, 2007**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1145, a bill to establish the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area in the State of Alabama.

The Department recommends that the committee defer action on H.R. 1145 and all other proposed heritage area designations until program legislation is enacted that establishes guidelines and a process for the designation of National Heritage Areas. Last year, the Administration sent to Congress a legislative proposal to establish guidelines and a process for designation. Bills were introduced in the 109th Congress (S. 243, H.R. 760 and H.R. 6287) that incorporated the majority of the provisions of the Administration's proposal, and S. 243 passed the Senate. During the 110th Congress, a similar heritage area program bill, S. 278, has been introduced, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this very important issue.

The National Park Service (NPS) is in the process of conducting a study, authorized by Public Law 107-348, to determine the suitability and feasibility of establishing a National Heritage Area (NHA) at Muscle Shoals. We expect to complete the study later this year, at which time we will

provide a recommendation on the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Muscle Shoals NHA. Until the study is completed, it would be premature to state a position on H.R. 1145.

With 37 NHA's designated across 27 states, and more heritage area legislative proposals in the pipeline, the Administration believes it is critical at this juncture for Congress to enact NHA program legislation. This legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed NHA's, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas. Program legislation also would clarify the expectation that heritage areas work toward self-sufficiency by outlining the necessary steps, including appropriate planning, to achieve that shared goal.

H.R. 1145 would establish the Muscle Shoals NHA in the counties of Colbert, Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, and Morgan in northwestern Alabama, would designate a local coordinating entity, and outline its duties. The bill would also authorize the development of a management plan within three years of enactment and authorize the use of federal funds to develop and implement that plan. If the plan is not submitted within three years of enactment of this Act, the NHA becomes ineligible for federal funding until a plan is submitted to the Secretary of the Interior. Additionally, the Secretary may, at the request of the management entity, provide technical assistance and enter into cooperative agreements with other public and private entities.

H.R. 1145 also contains safeguards to protect private property, including a prohibition on the use of federal funds to acquire real property. The bill proposes no new restrictions with regard to public use and access to private property.

Muscle Shoals is the name of a section of the Tennessee River in Alabama that historically presented major navigation hazards due to treacherous shoals and other natural obstructions. President Woodrow Wilson selected this part of the river for the construction of a dam for electric power and two nitrate production plants to strengthen national defense during World War I. The completion of the Wilson Dam in 1925 created a lake over the shoals, which solved the river's navigation problems. The facilities were transferred to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) upon its establishment in 1933. Consequently, Muscle Shoals is generally considered the birthplace of the TVA.

In addition to the Wilson Dam, the area has many notable historic and cultural resources, including the home of Helen Keller, Frank Lloyd Wright's Rosenbaum House, and a number of antebellum homes and other examples of early American architecture. The city of Florence hosts an annual music festival named for legendary blues musician W.C. Handy and the area has served as home to many other musicians who have made significant contributions to contemporary American music.

The Muscle Shoals region has many historically significant towns and cities. Among them are Mooresville in Limestone County, one of the state's earliest towns and Tuscumbia, an early frontier railroad town, which has become a noted heritage tourism destination. The area also

contains many museums, historic theaters, and art centers, including the Alabama Music Hall of Fame and the Jesse Owens Museum.

The Muscle Shoals region contains an array of American Indian resources, some of which are managed by the NPS. The Natchez Trace Parkway, Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail, and the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail run through the region. The University of Alabama has uncovered American Indian artifacts that indicate the area was among the earliest settled in the Southeast. An American Indian cultural center recently opened in Lawrence County and annual events featuring American Indian culture are held in at least three counties.

If the Committee chooses to move forward with this bill, the Department would recommend that the bill be amended to include an additional requirement for an evaluation to be conducted by the Secretary, three years prior to the cessation of federal funding under this act. The evaluation would examine the accomplishments of the heritage area in meeting the goals of the management plan; analyze the leveraging and impact of investments to the heritage area; identify the critical components of the management structure and sustainability of the heritage area; and recommend what future role, if any, the NPS should have with respect to the heritage area. We would be happy to work with the Subcommittee to develop this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.